

The Long Night

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Anko's curse seal malfunctions in a way no one could have imagined, leading to horrific results. Naruto and a strike team have one night to eliminate the problem at it's source. Otherwise the village of Konoha will be lost. - STORY IS BEING DISCONTINUED.

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The Failed Experiment

"Aaaah! Damn it!" Anko woke up clutching at her shoulder. Over that past week her curse seal had started to throb and hurt like hell at random times. Eventually it would always pass but the intervals between the attacks were getting shorter and the attacks seemed to be getting more intense.

"It's all right," she panted clutching at her shoulder. "I'm a ninja I can deal with pain. What cannot be changed can be endured."

The words brought little consolation as the seal suddenly throbbed.

"Aaaahh!" She clenched her shoulder so hard that her nails drew blood.

"Why me? Why have I got to be the lucky one?" With one hand she tossed aside the sheets and stumbled towards the bathroom. There were pain pills there in the cabinet, strong ones. She tried to avoid using them but this was a bad attack and she could already tell it was going to drag out an hour or more. She was tough but not a masochist no matter what some people thought.

These attacks were really worrying her. The seal on her shoulder had been dormant for years. Then without warning it had started to hurt for no apparent reason. The attacks had been coming quicker, lasting longer, and were becoming more and more violent. What scared her even more than the pain was the evidence that she was changing.

Switching on the light in the bathroom she looked at herself in the cabinet mirror above the sink. The skin around her curse mark had turned a sickening shade of grey; the mark itself had *grown* its inky lines spreading out to form a complex pattern within the area of infected skin. When she touched the mark she could feel heat coming from it, as though that one part of her body was fevered.

"Something is happening to me," she muttered fearfully. "I'm changing."

Once more she thought about reporting this to the Hokage. Tsunade just happened to be the world's greatest medical expert and top medic nin. If anyone could help her it would definitely be the Hokage. The problem was the reaction she would receive if anyone found out she was having trouble with her seal.

Even after many years of faithful service she was still something of a pariah in many people's eyes. The Hokage wouldn't condemn her of course, but there were plenty of others who were not so understanding. To them she would always be *his* apprentice. Forever bearing his mark and sharing in his shame no matter how hard she fought against it. Anything that connected her to Orochimaru was dangerous, and so rather than go directly to the Hokage she'd hesitated and hoped it would pass.

All the years of service didn't matter. All the times she'd put her life on the line for the village didn't matter. Even the fact she'd faced her former teacher determined to sacrifice her life in order to end his didn't make a damn bit of difference. People had actually whispered she'd been in his service all along. To some she would just always be suspect until the day she died.

"Fucking bastards I'd like to kill you all and feed you to my snakes!"

She clamped down her jaw and shook her head violently. No, no, no, that was wrong. Some people were just plain ignorant and that was all. She'd learned to accept it... mostly. Why was she having such violent thoughts about the villagers? Was the pain getting to her? Or was something going on inside her head?

She stared at herself in the mirror. Were her eyes changing color? Maybe it was a trick of the poor lighting, or maybe she was imaging things. She looked at her face and though her brown eyes had hints of yellow in them. She turned her face just a little and she could

swear she could see it clearly. She turned back and her eyes were normal again.

"The pain is driving me insane," she muttered.

She opened the cabinet and took out a nearly empty bottle of vicodin. She took five or six and crammed them into her mouth. Opening the faucet she cupped her hands and sucked in water until she got them all down.

"Something is wrong; something is definitely, definitely wrong." She stared at her face again. Her eyes looked normal. There was nothing normal about those black lines on her shoulder though or the party grey splotch of skin.

The pain was still there, but dulled. Like this it was bearable. In five to ten minutes the pills would really kick in and she would be out like a light. As she slouched back to her bed her thoughts were scattered.

"It isn't getting better... I'll see the Hokage tomorrow." She mumbled to herself. "Maybe she can fix it or maybe she can't. Maybe it's good if she can't. Then I can teach them."

She shook her head on the pillow. No, no, don't think that way.

Even if it is true.

How I would like to teach them all.

Normally the vicodin put her out like a light. She would fall into a deep and empty sleep and wake up in the morning her usual over exuberant self.

Tonight though would be different.

Tonight she would dream.

Dreams filled with color and texture and substance. Where walls bled and water ran up hill. Where she was a child of thirteen again and her beloved sensei was before her amid a field of skulls and bones. He was the one she loved and hated above all others. She had lived for him and longed to die with him. She could not even remember who she'd been before he'd come into her life. Everything about her was a twisted reflection of her sensei.

He was quiet.

She was loud.

He dressed conservatively.

She was always one step away from being cited for public indecency.

He was obsessed with immortality.

She didn't care if she lived or died.

She had no originality whatsoever. Every choice was based on him.

He was looking down at her with one of those slight, playful grins she had come to recognize as not being a sign of good humor, but a sign of interest. His yellow snake eyes measured her, saw through her, read her thoughts with a casual ease. She'd never been able to keep any secrets from him. Looking up at him now she felt that same old certainty that he could read her like an open book.

"So full of pain and rage little Anko," sensei said in his soft lilting whisper. "Tell me... what is it that fills you with such fury?"

He was a traitor. He had abandoned her and thrown her aside as if she were garbage. She hated him.

She also loved him, just as a child loves the parent no matter how much she'd suffered for it. On some level she'd always hungered for

his approval. Always wondered why her love had been rejected. She simply did not know how to stop caring about him.

"Why?" She asked in her little girl voice. "Why am I the only one who suffers?" It was a stupid question and not worthy of a shinobi, but it was the truth. She had loved with her whole heart. She had always done her best. She had always been loyal.

Weren't all those things supposed to be rewarded?

Why was she alone condemned?

His eyes glittered and she was certain he could read her thoughts. "You suffer because you are a failure," he answered simply. "I thought you might prove worthy to be my apprentice, but you lacked the will to seek power. So I used you as a test subject; and even there you disappointed me." He let out a sigh. "You are nothing but a failed experiment."

"No!" She shouted. "That can't be true! My life has to mean more than that!"

"Why?" He asked teasingly.

"Because I did everything I was supposed to!" She screamed. "I don't deserve to have my whole life labeled as a failure! I refuse to accept that! I'm not a traitor or a failure!"

Orochimaru eyed her curiously. "What is it you want?"

She answered without thinking, giving into the rage that had been in her heart for so long. "I want respect! I want to matter! I want people to look at me and keep their fucking mouths shut!"

Orochimaru laughed softly and looked very pleased. "What you want little Anko is power."

For a second her mind rebelled at that. A loyal ninja of the Leaf did not seek power; she was a tool for her Hokage and her village. A

ninja needed to be fearless and obedient and without ambition.

Her sensei had always hungered for power. Power over others and power over death and the limitations of the human body. She'd always suspected his true nature but had refused to look beyond the surface. When he'd forced her to see him for what he was she'd rejected him. In the end she refused to betray the village and so he had tossed her aside after giving her the curse seal as a final gift.

When she'd asked him why his answer had been simple and direct. 'You lack the will to seek power.'

Back then she'd been sure she'd made the right choice. That was before years of accusing looks and whispers spoken behind her back. Before being condemned for her sensei's crimes. Years of being an outcast and despised by many of the people she'd tried to protect. She never let them see how she hurt because of it, how all the looks and whispers poisoned her against the village she'd sacrificed for. She'd done the right thing and suffered for it.

For just a moment she held onto those old beliefs. But all the years of pain and anger rose up and blew them out like a candle in a strong wind.

"Yes," she answered. "I want power."

With those words.

With that choice.

Something inside her died, and something new was born.

Orochimaru's lips turned up in one of his very rare smiles. "If you want power little Anko you need only give into your hate. That is your only path. You are a failed experiment... but even failures can produce wondrous results some times."

She felt her entire body start to convulse and shake as everything around her disappeared.

Pain.

Fire.

Rebirth.

"Yesssssss," his voice whispered from the darkness. "Wondrous results indeed."

Naruto was stretching and looking up at a sky that was just beginning to lighten. After two and a half years away with Jiraiya held come back and his very first mission had been amazing. He'd helped save Gaara and beat those Akatsuki bastards and even gotten a possible clue to finding Sasuke! Chiyo's sacrifice to bring Gaara back had been sad, but it had been her choice and he honored her courage. For such an old woman she'd been pretty tough and really brave.

There had been other casualties as well, but those were not quite so tragic. Though they *were* disturbing.

"Yosh! My eternal rival are you ready for another piggy back ride?" Maito Gai said in his usual over exaggerated voice.

"Gai this really isn't necessary you know." Kakashi said while trying with only limited success to sit up. While his injuries were not life threatening they were serious enough to prevent him from making his way back to the village under his own power.

"Nonsense my eternal rival! Trust in me to see you safely home! It's a promise!" He presented a gleaming smile and thumbs up in a classic 'good guy pose.'

"I appreciate the effort, I honestly do." Kakashi said sounding uncomfortable. "It's just that I'd really rather not have you carry me around piggy back all the way to Konoha. It's just a tiny bit embarrassing."

Gai's thick eyebrows leapt up and down in astonishment. "Yosh! Why did you not say so? If you do not wish me to carry you piggy back I will not."

Kakashi exhaled a sigh of relief. His friend could be monumentally stubborn sometimes. "Thanks."

"Very well then!" Without warning Gai scooped up Kakashi and held him out in front in both arms bridal style. "I will get us to Konoha within six hours or I will jog naked around the village one hundred times!"

Naruto, Sakura, Neji, and Tenten stared at the image of Gai holding Kakashi in his arms like a young bride and shuddered.

Lee was filled with admiration and sent a glance towards Neji.

"Don't even ask!" The Hyuuga said cutting him off before he could speak.

"Gai this really isn't any better!"

"Yosh my eternal rival! There is no need to be shy! I will gladly hold you in my arms the entire way to the village! With my fires of youth to warm and protect you no harm will come to you while I am here!"

"Well that didn't sound gay at all," Sakura muttered.

"Come my youthful companions! Let us get back to the village as soon as we can!"

Soon the two squads were moving at top speed.

"I don't know about six hours," Naruto said. "But we should be back in time for me to have Ichiraku ramen for dinner. Man I can hardly wait."

"Is that still all you can think about? Seriously I sometimes think you have ramen on the brain." Sakura sent her teammate a shy glance and blushed a bit. "I think I'll have some sushi and rice when I get back. If a certain someone wanted to treat me I don't think I would mind." Her blush deepened just a tad and she looked at him encouragingly.

"You'd rather eat sushi instead of delicious Ichiraku ramen? Seriously?" Naruto shook his head. "No way I ever would!"

Sakura sent him an annoyed look and could just feel her temple throbbing. "You're a baka!" She snapped and pulled away ahead of him in a sudden burst of furious energy.

"Huh? What did I do?"

It was a beautiful morning in the Leaf village.

It was spring time and the cherry blossoms would be falling in a week or so. All over the village people were stirring, kids were getting ready to head off to school, adults to work. Shops and businesses began to open and get ready for another day. In the Tower of Fire the Hokage would be busy at work handing out assignments and receiving reports from returning teams.

There were of course ninja training in the designated training grounds or preparing to leave on a mission. Ninja would also be returning all through the day and looking to relax and enjoy some down time until the next mission. Merchants would be arriving as well as foreign and local lords and businessmen; all looking to hire shinobi for various missions.

As a rule a hidden village was always active. They drew all sorts of clients and the money they paid fed the local economy and supported all those regular businesses that provided whatever a shinobi might need. Walking thought the early morning streets the girl was humming softly to herself. Her best friend had suddenly left for a mission to Wind Country and rumors said that Naruto had come back and left with her too. She couldn't wait to talk to Sakura and find out about it. Unplanned mission were almost always interesting.

Yamanaka Ino arrived at the door of Anko's apartment early that morning. Being a member of the Yamanaka clan and having mind control and access abilities she was being recruited into the ANBU. Specifically into the Torture and Interrogation section. Anko was a former member and a specialist at intimidation. Ibiki had asked her to show Ino the ropes and try to help recruit her. Her father worked with his department from time to time and had been a great help. He hoped to have him daughter join them as a full member.

The problem with using her abilities to uncover things was that very often you saw and experienced memories that were... unsavory and once those memories were gained they were damn hard to forget. Her father assisted only when normal methods failed and often did so reluctantly. Ino was unsure but willing to at least listen.

Ino knocked on the apartment door. "Anko-san?"

"Come on in, it's open."

Ino entered the apartment and shut the door behind her. The place didn't look like Anko was expecting company. The cop and dishes from the previous night's meal were still on the table. She spotted more dirty dishes piled up in the sink and empty beer cans were lying her and there. The whole apartment smelled of alcohol and... vomit?

Ino frowned. *Not a very good first impression for someone who's supposed to be recruiting me.* "So Anko are we going to ANBU headquarters?"

"Actually there's been a little change of plans Ino. Could you come into my bedroom for a second?"

"Sure," Ino replied. She opened the door and came in. "So what do... mmmph!"

She was caught by surprise as an impossibly strong hand slapped down over her mouth and she was shoved against a wall. Surprise gave way to sudden fear when she got a good clear look at Anko's face.

Her skin was a metallic grey and her eyes yellow and slitted.

She was wearing just a fishnet shirt and so Ino could see a black tattoo that was all over her back and one shoulder. A single complex squiggle of twisting lines and barbs that gave an impression of sickness and disorder.

All that was not what scared her the most though.

It was her mouth filled with yellow razor sharp teeth.

Anko smiled revealing an entire mouth full of those triangular shark like fangs. "You'll be first."

Savagely Anko bit down into the girl's shoulder and injected the poison.

Ino screamed and screamed... but no one heard her.

A Brave New World

She bit down hard.

The blood tasted hot and sweet.

Ino tried to fight, but Anko kept one hand clamped tight over her mouth and the other gripping one wrist. As she injected the poison Anko thought that she could, smell Ino's fear. It was a scent that was thick and strong and oh so appetizing.

A girl could get used to this.

With the poison in Ino's system Anko pulled her face back. She wasn't a zombie and she wasn't going to start eating human flesh... even if the blood *did* taste good. She'd ripped open a large wound in Ino's shoulder and it was bleeding freely. It was splattering on her wall and running down the girl's purple tank top. Ino's eyes were wide and terrified and she was trying to thrash about like a wild animal caught in a trap.

"Easy now darlin'." Anko said soothingly. "I know it hurts but it'll be better in a little bit."

Ino tried to yell again and to punch with her free arm and kick. For a Chunin her efforts were a bit feeble.

After about a minute Ino's arms and legs began to twitch and her head began to spasm back and forth. After one more minute of that the movements slowed and her body became limp. Very carefully Anko took her hand away from Ino's mouth. The girl was breathing and her eyes were still wide open. Ino was now paralyzed.

Anko noted the wound knitting and repairing itself. The new skin there was grey in color. Anko carefully set the girl down on the floor to observe her. This was all new to her after all. She was acting on instinct and *thought* she knew what would happen next.

As she waited Anko took a look at herself in the mirror.

Her eyes were yellow and slitted like a snake's. Like sensei's had been. Her teeth were jagged and razor sharp. Her skin was now a steely grey and her left shoulder and much of her neck were now engulfed by the expanded curse mark.

She looked at her hands.

The tips were coal black and ended in bony claws.

Her mind was still there. Her will, her intelligence, her memories, her hate. She still possessed chakra and the ability to use jutsus. Her body was filled with vitality and strength. Taking out a kunai she slowly bent the metal blade using only her bare hands (bare claws?) She wasn't dead or undead but she very clearly was no longer human.

She was something better.

For a moment she wondered if this was what Orochimaru had planned from the start. Frowning she wound up shaking her head. No, as brilliant as he was she didn't believe it. If he had actually expected this he would have kept her in his service. She'd have been a double agent like that little prick Kabuto.

No, she'd just been an experiment. One hell of an experiment as it turned out, but nothing more than that. No doubt if he could see what had happened to her he'd be eager to use her to his own ends.

Too damn bad, she thought. I have plans of my own now.

Looking in the mirror she performed a simple henge. There was a puff of smoke and as soon as it cleared she looked like her old self. That was good. It would make things easier.

It took about ten minutes for Ino to complete her metamorphosis.

As she lay on the floor paralyzed and whimpering in pain her skin had slowly turned the same shade of grey as Anko's. It had spread out from her shoulder to slowly engulf Ino's entire body. The girl's face had twitched violently and she had moaned loudest as her eyes and teeth were transformed.

On Ino's shoulder were three barbs on what looked like black ink.

When the change was finally complete Ino at last regained control of her body and slowly got to her feet.

"Welcome to the club," Anko said cheerfully. "How do you feel?"

Ino's snakelike eyes blinked. "Actually I feel pretty amazing, like I'm bursting with energy." She glanced at the mirror with a frown.

"Though I'm not happy to be so ugly."

"Oh don't worry about it," Anko said. "Before long everyone is gonna look like us."

Ino turned her attention back to her. "So what do you want me to do... master?" The last word came out hesitantly but still came.

Anko smiled. "Master, huh? Gotta say that's got a nice ring to it. You know all of a sudden I think I understand my old sensei a little better. I think I just might like having power over others." She nodded to herself. "Well first things first, we need to go and do a little recruiting."

"Shikamaru," Ino purred.

The Jonin frowned at her. "What's going on Ino? I thought you were going to be busy at ANBU headquarters today."

She slunk towards him smiling slyly and slipped her arms around one of his. "I blew it off; I have more important things to worry about."

"Like what?"

"Like you of course, Shika-kun." She blew in his ear and made him shiver.

He sent her a nervous glance. After Sasuke abandoned the village she had actually flirted with him a couple of times. Nothing had ever come of it and he felt they had resolved to be nothing more than friends and occasional teammates. She was bossy, loud, and pushy; but even Shikamaru would admit she was a real beauty and had her charms when she bothered to use them.

"Listen Ino you're being even more troublesome than usual," Shikamaru said trying to sound as nonchalant as possible.

"Come with me Shika and I'll show you troublesome."

Yanking his arm she began to drag him off towards the wooded training grounds.

"Hey! Wait a second!" Shikamaru tried to pull free but to his surprise could not. "Have you been working out?"

"Oh stop being such a baby," Ino chided. "You'll thank me for this later. You, Chouji, and Asuma-sensei. I'm going to make sure our team stays together."

"Ino what are you talking about? What's gotten into you?"

She laughed and her smile was filled with mischief. "Just wait and see, it'll be amazing I promise you!"

"Troublesome," he muttered.

Ino only laughed and pulled him along faster.

Morino Ibiki, Konoha Tokubetsu Jōnin and head of the ANBU's torture and interrogation section was not a sociable man. Though an

active ninja for more than twenty years he had no close friends. Unlike other ninja he did not go out to drink at the bars or look for women. He did not have any close family and his former Genin teammates and sensei were all long dead. His scarred and intimidating face rarely smiled and very few had ever heard him actually laugh.

When he did smile it was usually when he'd broken someone's will in an interrogation. He did not believe in physical tortures. Oh he had no objection to using them; he merely preferred other methods. Threats and fear and exhaustion and questions meant to cause his victim to doubt everything they believed. He examined the target found its weaknesses and then slowly, meticulously began to tear open the cracks until a person was mentally broken.

In short Morino Ibiki was a sadist.

He *liked* causing mental anguish and destroying a person from the inside out. Even among his fellow ninja, for whom violence was a necessary and accepted part of life, this was not something to be admired. To his credit Ibiki understood that and did not try to convince others that it was not so strange or revolting as they thought. Rather instead he found a place where his interests could be put to a positive use and where he would be allowed to indulge in them.

He came to take great professional pride in his role of interrogator. People respected his ability even if his passion for his work also repulsed them.

Oddly that was something Anko had always rather liked about him. Too many people were too worried about whether or not they were liked. They would let the reaction of others dictate what they would or would not do. Anko always did as she pleased and let people deal with the results. Though she had often felt the displeasure of the crowds she too had taken pride in her ability to get the job done and tried not to worry about the opinions of others.

So while their personalities were about as polar as could be imagined she and Ibiki had actually worked well together. She took a certain amount of pride that he even trusted her, as far as a man like Ibiki was able to trust anyone.

That was why when she had arrived at ANBU headquarters and asked for a private meeting with him he had agreed.

"So what is this about Anko?" Ibiki said in his usual serious and solemn tone. "I notice you don't have Ino with you. You know how useful it would be if we could get a Yamanaka to join our section as a full time member."

"About that," Anko said brightly. "You should forget about Ino, there's something much more important going on."

He frowned but she kept his full attention. "I'm listening."

"I have learned of a plot to overthrow the Hokage and take over the village."

It was a stunning revelation that would have had most people stammering and shouting. Ibiki simply continued to stare at her, giving away nothing. From his reaction she might have just told him it was going to rain later.

"Coming from you Anko I will assume this is a credible threat and not one of your little jokes."

"Oh the threat is real enough," she assured him. "It's easily the biggest danger the village has faced since the sneak attack during the Chunin exams three years ago."

"That time the threat came from Orochimaru. Does this also involve him?"

Anko's pleasant smile twisted and soured. "You assume that because it's me bringing you the information?"

"It's not an insult Anko, just a reasonable speculation. You were the one who first uncovered Orochimaru's presences at the exams."

"Heh, well it just so happens that Orochimaru is involved, though not directly."

"He sent in one of his agents like Kabuto?"

Anko shook her head. "More like an unintentional creation of his."

Ibiki's frown deepened just a fraction. "What do you mean?"

"You know how Orochimaru has always loved experimentation. ANBU captain Tenzou is able to use Mokuton techniques because of that."

"At the cost of only ninety nine other babies who didn't survive the experiment."

"Well my old sensei was never one to worry about the costs. All that ever mattered to him were results." Anko said. "He conducted a lot of different experiments. So many in fact he didn't always bother to stick around to observe the results."

"And one of these failed experiments is the problem?"

"Hey! If it were just that do you think I'd be here? I definitely wouldn't call it a failed experiment when it's going to take over Konoha! Orochimaru tossed out a lot of seeds, it was bound to happen that one would take root and bear some pretty amazing fruit."

"All right then, tell me about this threat."

"Well, to put it simply, Orochimaru always liked to play God and he finally succeeded beyond even his wildest dreams. He's actually gone ahead and created a new life form. Something far beyond human, but with the ability to transform humans into copies of it."

"What? Sort of like cancer cells infecting healthy ones?"

Anko smirked. "That's one way of putting it I suppose."

"What does this new life form do exactly?"

"It has immense strength, speed, and physical endurance. It can see in the dark, has advanced senses, and has enhanced mental abilities. It can keep in contact with its minions and control their will. One master, with all the others bound in service to her."

"Her?" Ibiki said softly.

Two sets of calm eyes locked.

They both moved in the same second. Ibiki to get to the door and Anko to hit him. Had she been human she might have made it in time or might not. But she was faster and stronger now. Her fist slammed into his square jaw and sent him flying into the far wall of his office. Anko had no fears that anyone would have heard the ruckus. Ibiki often conducted interrogations here and had ordered the walls thickened and a six inch wooden door installed specifically to keep others from hearing the wails and pleas of his subjects.

Despite her ferocious hit Ibiki was still trying to stand. Anko delivered a kick to the side of his knee that toppled him over face down. She grabbed both of his wrists and held them up behind his back as she drove a knee down between his shoulders pinning him.

Ibiki grunted and fought to get free but it was hopeless.

"Why?" He barked out when he realized he wasn't going to escape.
"Were you really a traitor all this time?"

"Oh come on, have more self-respect than that. I never could have worked for you all these years and fooled you. Even I'm not that good. The truth is I was loyal to Hokage and village one hundred percent until yesterday. That's when my seal came to life and I stepped up on the food chain."

"Anko don't do this," Ibiki said trying to sound reasonable. "Whatever it is Orochimaru has done to you I'm sure it can be fixed. Don't betray the village; don't serve the man when you know he is only using you."

"Is that what you think I'm doing?" A light laugh and a shake of the head. "I'm not Orochimaru's servant any more. He may have set all this in motions but **I'm** the one in control now. This is even bigger than you imagine. Konoha is just the first step, by the end of the year the whole *world* will be mine. It's the dawn of a new age Ibiki, and we're crossing into a brand new frontier. The time of man has come to its end. From now on the world will belong to the *Yajuu* . Welcome aboard."

She bit down into his forearm and injected the poison.

Ibiki screamed for help as loudly as he could, but no one outside his office heard a thing.

Anko kept a firm hold of him for a minute though she made no effort to keep him quiet. When he began to twitch uncontrollably she let go and sat down in his chair to wait for the process to run its course. After ten minutes he came to his feet. Three ink black barbs appeared on his left forearm above the wrist.

"What are your orders master?" There was no hesitation as with Ino. He was single minded and ready to carry out his orders whatever they were. Other than making them submissive to her Anko was glad to see her minions kept their personalities and intelligence. Commanding an army of mindless zombies would have been boring and not real efficient.

"We need to start recruiting and adding to the ranks. Start calling in the top ANBU one at a time every fifteen minutes. Just announce you're conducting an investigation and no one will see it as strange. One ANBU every fifteen minutes. In eight hours we'll have thirty two of them." Her smile was predatory. "Then we'll send them out to do the same by the end of the day we'll have all the ninja in Konoha

under my control. After that we can change the civilians too and move out from the village."

"Anyone in particular you want to recruit first?"

"How about Tenzou? I always kind of liked that guy, he's got scary eyes."

Ino led him out into the middle of training ground one.

Shikamaru was surprised to see someone else already there waiting for him.

"Chouji? Did Ino drag you into this too?"

His best friend came over to stand next to him. "Yeah," he said smiling and rubbing the back of his head. "You know Ino; she didn't give me much choice."

Shikamaru sighed. "She really is loud and pushy, just like always."

"Hey!" Ino yelled at him. "Is this the thanks I get for going through all this trouble just to make sure we stay together?"

"Stay together? I didn't realize we'd separated. We're not part of team Asuma anymore but we're still friends and fellow leaf nin."

"Things are about to change and I wanted to make sure I had all of you with me." Ino said.

Shikamaru frowned at her. Except when she was plotting some outlandish ambush for Sasuke she didn't usually bother hiding her intentions. He glanced to where she was still holding tight to his arm. She had always been a bit strong for a girl but she'd never had such an iron grip before. The Yamanaka clan was never known for physical strength.

"Ino, seriously, what is all this about? Why did you drag me and Chouji out here?"

She smiled and began to lean in close to him. "Like I already told you I just want to make sure we all stay together."

There was something in her eyes that made his skin crawl. Shikamaru did not understand what was going on but he's known Ino just about all his life and knew *something* was wrong.

Just as she was about to reach his shoulder with her mouth she froze, unable to move. Shikamaru took a step back and she was compelled to as well. Their shadows were locked together.

"I'm sorry about this Ino but I think maybe we should go see the Hokage. There's something wrong with you."

She smiled at him. "You really know me well don't you?"

"I do," Shikamaru said seriously.

"Good thing I know you too."

A thick arm grabbed Shikamaru around the neck and without warning Chouji was biting down on his shoulder.

"Chouji!" Shika cried out.

"If I've learned anything about you Shikamaru it's that you trust Chouji completely and the best way to get to you is through him."

"I'm really sorry Shika," Chouji told him. "But you'll understand after you've changed."

"What... what are you two..." His body began to shake and he could no longer speak.

Ino looked pleased with herself. "Now we just need to recruit sensei."

A Change of Plans

"Let's take a short break." Anko sat down into a chair in Ibiki's office.

"Is there a problem master?" Ibiki asked. "We've only 'recruited' twelve agents so far. There is still a long way to go."

"I know that," Anko said sounding a bit annoyed. With one finger she tapped her temple. "I just need a minute to deal with the voices in my head."

Ibiki sent her an amused look.

"If you make a joke I swear I'll cut your balls off." She promised him.

"I wouldn't think of it."

"Liar." She said with a chuckle.

Ibiki looked at her questioningly for a moment. "Were you serious about voices in your head?"

"Afraid so," Anko replied. "Each person that gets turned into a Yajuu ends up being connected to me. I can hear their thoughts. It's freaking annoying."

I wonder if insanity is a side effect of the transformation, Ibiki thought.

"I heard that!" Anko snapped. "I'm not crazy; at least not any more than I always was. I'm just learning how to deal with being the damn queen of a whole race."

"If you really can read my thoughts what am I thinking right now?"

Anko frowned. "You're wondering if I'm ever going to pay you that two thousand ryu I borrowed."

"So you really can read my thoughts."

"Oh I can do a bit more than that." Anko said sweetly.

Ibiki suddenly felt compelled to place one hand on his waist and another out to his side. He then began to sing in his gruff voice as he rocked his hips back and forth. "I'm a little tea pot short and stout, this is my handle this is my spout."

Howling with laughter Anko applauded. "You missed your calling Ibiki. Instead of torture and interrogation you should have gone into entertainment."

Mercifully he regained control of himself and put both arms back down to the side. "You can control all your followers? That's pretty damn impressive."

"Well that would be impressive," Anko admitted. "But it doesn't work that way. I can only take over one person at a time. I can however send out mental commands to everyone at once though."

"Well that's certainly very useful, you can make sure everyone gets information and orders without wasting time or the risk of someone not being contacted." Ibiki looked at her questioningly. "But if you're having trouble now with incoming thoughts what will you do when there are thousands or millions of them?"

"I can block them out," Anko told him. "Good thing too, if I had that many voices yammering away I really would go nuts."

She let out an amused chuckle.

"I haven't gotten it down perfect yet but I've been working on it from the start. I mean the very first person I recruited was Ino. I swear to you that every fifteen minutes she thinks about making out with or marrying Uchiha Sasuke; and her mental image of him is as a twelve year old. Even I find that pretty disturbing."

Ibiki shrugged. "Well there's no accounting for taste."

"Anyway, when someone feels really intense emotions that sets off a bit of a flare in my head. I can decide to focus in on their thoughts if I want. For instance, Ino has been on a constant high for a while now."

"What exactly is she up to?" Ibiki asked.

"I gave her orders to recruit ninja while keeping a low profile. She's already gotten her two former teammates and is looking for her old sensei now."

Ibiki frowned. "From what I know about her Ino isn't exactly skilled at keeping a low profile."

"Why did you want her for your unit then?"

"She's a Yamanaka, her abilities are ideal for information gathering in a controlled environment. She wouldn't exactly be my first choice for anything involving deception though."

"With all the Inuzukas who can pick up odd scents and all the Hyuugas who can see through genjutsus it's only a matter of time before someone notices what's going on." Anko told him. "I need to get as many ninja under my control as quickly as I can before that happens. I just don't have time to waste."

Ibiki shrugged. "Well you're the master."

"Bet your ass I am." Anko got up and stretched. "Okay call in the next one on our list. Time's wasting."

On an apartment building rooftop not far from his home Asuma was spending a little quiet time with the woman in his life. He was holding Kurenai in his arms and kissing her.

Kurenai pulled away slightly and made a sour face. "You smell like cigarettes again."

"Sorry," he leaned in to kiss her again but Kurenai slid her hand in front of his face. "What?"

"How many times have I asked you to quit? It's a bad habit and it's going to shorten your lifespan."

"I'm a ninja, a long and healthy life isn't something I really need to worry about."

"Your father the Hokage made it to old age," she noted pointedly. "It has been known to happen. I'd like you to at least try and not shave years off your life."

"Fine," he tried to give her a charming smile. "I promise to quit... eventually."

Kurenai rolled her eyes. "I've heard that before."

Asuma tried to kiss her again only to run into the palm of her hand once more.

"Now what?"

"Just how much longer are we going to keep our relationship a secret?"

"This again?" He sighed. "Didn't we both agree things would be much simpler if we kept things quiet?"

"That was more than three years ago," she reminded him. "We shouldn't still need to hide things. Frankly I'm not sure if there's even a point any more. Every time I run into Kiba after seeing you he gets this silly grin on his face and can't keep from laughing. I'm pretty sure he can sniff out your scent all over me. Hinata giggles and Shino is always really talkative."

Asuma quirked an eyebrow. " *Shino* is talkative?"

"Well for him," Kurenai amended. "Doesn't Ino always ask you to say hello to me whenever you buy me flowers at her family's shop? If she knows then Shikamaru and Chouji both know too."

Asuma remembered a team meal more than a year ago.

"So sensei," Shikamaru had asked. "I'm trying to get Temari to ask me out on a date. Any advice?"

"What?" Ino had barked. "If you want to go out with her why don't you just tell her that?"

"Obviously it would be much too troublesome if I were to be the one to ask. With my luck she'd expect me to take her shopping or something." He gave Ino a flat look. "Nothing is worth that."

"Why are you asking me?" Asuma replied nervously.

"Well you've been dating Kurenai all this time so I figured you must know *something* about women and their strange ways." Shikamaru said.

"I don't know what you're talking about." Asuma laughed weakly. "Kurenai and I are just good friends."

His three former students all gave him identical looks that pretty much shouted, 'yeah right.'

"Do you usually get flowers for your good friends?" Ino asked.

"Or make out with them?" Shikamaru asked.

"If you do could you tell us what Kakashi-sensei looks like beneath his mask?" Chouji asked. Shika and Ino gaped at their former teammate. "What? You've never wondered?"

By the time their attention was focused back to him Asuma had made good his escape.

"I suppose they might have their suspicions," Asuma admitted.

"When we began this we both agreed to keep it quiet because we were both brand new senseis and didn't want to give our teams any unneeded distractions. That's not the case anymore. Honestly, why do we still need to sneak around?"

"Isn't it just simpler this way?" Asuma asked. "We both wanted things to be casual without serious commitment."

Kurenai pulled away from him and out of his arms.

"That was three years ago," she told him. "Isn't it past time we changed that?"

"We're ninja," Asuma said quietly. "Either of us could die tomorrow."

"That's just as true of a wagon driver or carpenter. Life doesn't come with guarantees."

"A carpenter isn't likely to be ordered to into Mist to perform an assassination or be sent to the front lines of a war. The odds are a little different for us."

"I can't deny that," she answered. "But we might live another twenty years and even shinobi are allowed to have lives and families you know."

"Families?" Asuma said clearly startled. This was a subject that had never been brought up between them. For obvious reasons starting a family was a serious matter; even more so if one or both parents were shinobi.

"Don't tell me you've never at least thought about it."

"You know I lost my brother and a lot of good friends during the war and afterwards. I had a lot of issues with my father because of it and we never really settled things before he was killed. I love my nephew but I don't know if I want to take on that sort of responsibility. Not when I can't be sure I'll be around."

Kurenai was clearly not pleased with his answer.

"You can't just assume the worst. Yes, our lives are dangerous, but that only makes the things we love that much more precious. We are entitled to love and to hope and to live just like everyone else."

"Maybe, but I'm not sure I'm really the type to be raising a family."

"Really?" Kurenai gave him a wide smile. "I think you would make a wonderful father."

"You know you are starting to make me very nervous."

Kurenai had a great deal more to say on the subject, but she could sense three figures approaching them and had a good guess who they would be.

Asuma could also sense them coming and gave her an apologetic grin. "Could you..."

"Fine, but we will continue this later." She made a hand sign and vanished in a swirl of wind and leaves.

A moment later Ino landed on the rooftop followed by Chouji and Shikamaru.

"Sensei," Ino said cheerfully. She scanned the rooftop and the nearby buildings. "You're not here with Kurenai-sensei by any chance are you?"

"Heh, of course not," Asuma replied weakly. "What a silly idea."

Ino still looked about the area until satisfied they were alone. "Just checking."

Asuma nodded to the members of his former team. "There some special reason the three of you came looking for me? Am I needed for a mission?"

"It has nothing to do with a mission, but it is really important." Ino told him. "You could say we've come to recruit you."

"Recruit me?" Asuma asked. "Do you mean into the ANBU? If so I've had the offer before. I'm not interested."

"Oh this is way more important than joining the ANBU." Ino told him. She made a slight motion with her left ring finger.

That was the signal and Shikamaru quickly performed some basic hand signs. "*Kageshibari no Jutsu* ."

Caught completely off guard Asuma felt his body go rigid as Shikamaru's shadow merged with his.

"Shikamaru! What do you think you're doing?"

"I'm sorry sensei." Shika bowed his head slightly and Asuma was compelled to do the same. "I know this is troublesome for you but it's kind of necessary. You'll understand once you're one of us."

"I wanted to make sure we reunited the old team." Ino clasped her hands together. "It would break my heart if we weren't all on the same side sensei."

"Ino, you and Shikamaru are not making any sense. We are Leaf ninja. Even if we are no longer team ten we will always be on the same side. Now release me right now or I am going to have to report this."

Shikamaru held his hand out in front of him and Asuma did likewise.

Ino sauntered over to her former sensei and took his outstretched hand. "This will hurt a little, but then everything will be clear."

She bit down onto his wrist, ripping it open and letting the blood flow down the side of her jaws.

"Ino!" Asuma shouted. There was a sudden sharp pain and he could feel heat flowing up his arm. He could tell immediately that there was something very wrong with him.

Ino slapped a hand over his mouth. There was blood all over her mouth and the front of her throat. "Don't shout sensei, it will be over in just a moment."

"Hey! What are you three doing?"

Ino, Shika, and Chouji turned startled faces in the opposite direction. There were a pair of ANBU on the rooftop across the street. One had a sword out and the other a pair of kunai.

"Ino!" Chouji wailed. "How could you miss them?"

"I didn't!" A bewildered Ino shouted.

"If they get out an alert it will be a lot more than troublesome." Shikamaru said.

"There's no choice but to deal with them then." Ino brought her hands in front of her eyes in the shape of a rectangle. "*Shintenshin no Jutsu* ."

The ANBU she was aiming at did not move which meant she should have been able to take control of his body. But her mental energies found no new home waiting for her. That meant it would take at least twenty minutes for her consciousness to return to her real body.

Huh? But he didn't move! This should have worked! Ino wanted to call out to her teammates but her physical body was now slumped

on the roof floor unconscious. Worse, with loss of consciousness her henge had been dispelled. Her true form was revealed.

Though Asuma was still bound his eyes were able to see what she now was. "Ino! What's happened to her?"

"By the time I explained it you'd already understand." Shikamaru said. With his jutsu already active he was not forced to perform any additional hand signs that would give his intentions away.

Splitting away another piece of his shadow he sent it to the edge of the building where it merged with its shadow. Concentrating completely on his actions he forced his shadow across the street to merge with the other building's. He was then able to have two independent shadows emerge, streak across the opposite roof and meld with the shadows of the two ANBU.

To his surprise though he did not gain control of them.

His sharp mind came to the obvious conclusion. "We've just been had."

"What do you..." Chouji began just as a swift kick nailed him in the back of the head.

Shikamaru was hit with the blunt end of a kunai in the temple at the same instant. The two of them were dropped where they stood. As with Ino their henges were terminated and their true forms revealed.

With the danger now gone Kurenai appeared. She ended her genjutsu and the two ANBU vanished from sight. She had decided she wanted more words with Asuma and so had hidden herself nearby. Seeing what was happening she had intervened. She stared at the three ninja she'd known since they'd originally become genin. *What happened to them?*

Along with the genjutsu the shadow binding was also ended. Asuma collapsed to his knees. His body was starting to twitch and shake

and there was the most horrible pain wracking his muscles and his guts.

Kurenai was at his side. "Asuma! Are you all right?"

"No," he muttered through gritted teeth. "I'm not sure how but I think I've been poisoned." His eyes were drawn to Ino who was just a few feet away. Her skin was grey and she had claws and fangs. "What could have done this?"

"I don't know but we need to get you medical help right away." She draped one arm across her shoulders and got him up onto his shaking legs. "We also need to alert the Hokage about this."

Performing a hand sign they vanished in a swirl of wind and leaves.

Anko frowned. "Now that's weird."

"Something wrong master?" Ibiki asked

"I felt a lot of excitement coming from Ino, Shikamaru, and Chouji just a minute ago. If it were just Ino I'd ignore it but since it was all three I decided to check it out."

"And?"

"And nothing. I can't read their thoughts. That means they're not having any."

"You mean they're dead?"

"No," Anko said slowly. "They're definitely still alive. I'd feel it if they were dead."

"So you're saying they've been knocked out?" Ibiki asked.

"That's what it looks like."

"That could be a serious problem." Ibiki said. "They were trying to get Sarutobi Asuma right? Maybe they bit off a lot more than they could chew."

"That's what I get for trusting a girl who has wet dreams about assaulting a twelve year old." Anko began to rub her temples. "Well if things ran too smoothly what would be the fun in that? Remind me later to give Ino a stern talking."

"This is serious." Ibiki told her. "More than likely we've got a breach of security. If they failed to capture Asuma and he knows at least some of what you have planned he'll alert the Hokage immediately."

"I know that." Anko told him.

"You seem awfully calm considering what may be about to happen master."

Chuckling she took out a kunai and began to twirl it about her forefinger. "Well to tell you the truth I'm happy. Doing things quietly and without notice has never been my style."

Ibiki immediately recalled the Chunin Exams from three years ago when Anko had made her grand entrance smashing through a window with a **banner** proclaiming who she was.

"You don't say?"

Hearing his tone only made her laugh. "Okay change of plans." With a slight effort she sent out a mental command to all of her subjects. "*Screw secrecy, start biting everyone you can. Get ninjas first but go ahead and change the civilians too. Let's take them all!*"

Those Who Have Truly Lived

ANBU operative Aiko was getting ready to go on a mission to Rain Country. Her mask depicted a hummingbird and the green haired ninja had on her armor and all of her weapons. This was an S class mission. There had been many political upheavals in Rain lately since the end of their civil war and the fall of Hanzo. Who was in control of the country was not clear and their intentions were completely unknown.

Several undercover operatives had already been sent in and all of them had disappeared without a trace. Her mission orders were very specific; go in, find out as much as possible without taking any significant risks, get out and report back. Aiko intended to follow her orders to the letter; even so she understood that the odds were heavy against her ever making it back. She understood and accepted that. Death held no terror for those who had truly lived. The ANBU were the elite of Konoha and the personal weapons of the Hokage. They were always tasked with the most important and dangerous missions.

She would carry out her duty no matter the risk.

"Aiko," a relieved voice spoke. "I am so glad I caught you."

She turned about to see Tenzou approaching her. "Your timing is excellent I'm just about to leave on a mission. Did you come to wish me luck?"

As he came up to her she was slightly surprised to sense a henge.

"No, I've got new orders for you." Tenzou said pleasantly.

"The Hokage is cancelling my mission?"

Tenzou shook his head. "The orders aren't from the Hokage but from our new master."

"What are you talking about?"

"You'll understand in a bit. Oh, and I apologize."

"For what?"

"This."

Tenzou slammed a hand over her mouth and bit into her shoulder.

The startled Aiko instinctively tried to hit him and pull free but Tenzou had surprising amount of strength. She kept fighting to break free or at the least shout for help.

"You'll understand soon I promise." He sounded apologetic even as he fought to keep her from getting away.

After just a minute her body became paralyzed and she was helpless.

Tenzou nodded. "One more recruit."

Completing a shun shin Kurenai burst through the main entrance of Konoha General. She had Asuma in her arms. She didn't understand what had happened to Ino and the others or why she had bitten Asuma, but he really did seem to be poisoned somehow. He was no longer able to speak and appeared to be paralyzed.

"Someone please help me!" Kurenai screamed.

The startled hospital staff rushed over to her, including Shizune.

"Kurenai! What happened to Asuma?"

"I think he's been poisoned. Ino did it, though I think she may have been infected with something. You need to help him and you need to contact the Hokage!"

Shizune checked Asuma's pulse and used a basic diagnostic jutsu. The result was like nothing she had ever encountered before. His entire metabolism and chakra system was being altered, and it was happening very quickly.

"Get him to Operating Room One stat! Place him within a stasis seal. Contact the Hokage and tell her we have an emergency here that requires her medical expertise." Shizune turned to Kurenai. "Tell me everything as quickly and concisely as you can."

Tsunade took her duties as Hokage seriously... more or less. At heart though she had always seen herself as a medic nin and as a healer. So when Shizune had called her about Asuma's case she had not hesitated to get to the hospital as quickly as possible.

By the time she had arrived Asuma was inside a stasis seal designed to stabilize his condition. The seal was a large circle permanently drawn upon the floor of each operating room with a vast set of complex symbols drawn within it. Four medic nins sat on the perimeter of the circle focusing chakra into the seal.

"I don't understand," Shizune said. She was one of the four medics trying desperately to help Asuma. "We seem to be slowing it but he is still slipping away."

"You mean he's dying?" Kurenai asked worriedly. She had refused to leave the operating room and was standing behind Shizune.

"He is not dying." Shizune told her, but with an expression that held no pleasure.

"But that's good isn't it?"

"What's affecting him isn't *designed* to kill him." Tsunade replied grimly. She was the only one inside the seal with Asuma. She was kneeling over him using all her expertise to find the answer. His eyes were open and he appeared conscious but was unable to speak or

reply to her questions in any way. "Describe how Ino, Shikamaru, and Chouji appeared again."

"They had grey skin, yellow slitted eyes, clawed fingers, and very sharp teeth."

"And you're sure Ino bit him?" Tsunade pointed to the wound on his wrist.

"Absolutely, I saw her do it."

"I see." Tsunade answered sounding even more worried. "Taiseiki."

"Hai Hokage-sama." One of her guards answered.

"Take a squad to the location where Asuma was attacked. If Ino, Shikamaru, and Chouji are still there take them into custody and secure them. Treat them as S level threats and take special care not to allow them to bite you. If they aren't there I want a full scale search begun. call in the ANBU as well as the hunter nin, capturing them is our top priority." She hesitated before continuing. "If they cannot be captured have them killed."

"Understood Hokage-sama." He vanished in a flash.

"Killed?" Kurenai exclaimed. "Isn't that too much? Even though they attacked him they are Asuma's beloved students. He wouldn't want them killed under any circumstances."

"Kurenai," Shizune said sharply. "The Lady Tsunade would never give such an order unless it was absolutely necessary."

"That's very true. Believe me Kurenai I didn't give that order lightly. What we are dealing with here is just too dangerous to risk letting it go unchecked. Above all I need to find the source of this and stop the infection before it spreads out of control."

"You know what this is then? You know what's happening to Asuma?"

"I don't, not exactly; I've never encountered anything quite like this. But some of the symptoms are similar to Orochimaru's curse seal. I suspect that this may be some even more dangerous variant of that."

"You mean that Orochimaru is in the village?" Shizune asked.

"It's definitely possible. The bastard snuck in once before for the Chunin Exams, I wouldn't put it past him to do it again. He also might have sent in an agent like Kabuto to do the dirty work for him. Whichever the case it's absolutely vital we find who the source of this is before it spreads too far."

An ANBU agent named Hisoka entered a room where a pale skinned agent was busy writing a report.

Sai glanced up from his work and produced one of his typical soulless smiles. "Good afternoon agent Hisoka, Can I help you?"

Among the ANBU there was no shortage of maladjusted personalities. Just being a shinobi was difficult enough with all the demands and stresses that came with a ninja's lifestyle. Being ANBU and being expected to handle only the most difficult assignments, the enforced isolation from the rest of the village, the violent and immoral nature of their work all helped make the stress more than most rational minds could handle. Operatives tended to be anti-social and develop extreme personality traits. Alcoholism, drug abuse, domestic violence, extreme depression, were all common.

Yet even within the ANBU Sai was known for being odd.

Hisoka strolled up to him casually pretending not to be bothered by those lifeless eyes. "This will only take a moment."

He quickly grabbed Sai's wrist and brought it up to his mouth. He gave a single deep bite to inject the poison. Sai made no effort to resist or cry out in pain.

Hisoka's eyes widened and he shoved the arm away as he began spitting out in distaste. "Ink?"

The form in front of him lost its color and texture and dissolved into a puddle of ink on the floor.

Hisoka was momentarily caught off guard and did not see or sense as a painting on the wall behind him transformed into the real Sai.

"I was trained by Danzo-sama never to let my guard down, even in ANBU headquarters." Sai explained as he slammed a kunai into the back of Hisoka's head killing him.

With his death Hisoka's true form was revealed. Sai carefully examined the body. Hisoka had not only been an ANBU operative but a fellow Root member. Danzo-sama would need to be informed of this. This might not be an isolated incident but might represent some sort of infiltration of the village.

Taking his scroll out Sai quickly wrote out a concise report of what had just occurred. He then drew the image of a canary and brought it to life. Sealing the report inside the canary he gave it instructions to deliver it to Danzo-sama.

It did not occur to Sai to also forward this information to the Hokage. For as long as he could remember he'd been taught that his first and unquestioned loyalty was to Danzo and to Root. Danzo-sama would make the decision whether or not to forward the report.

In the meantime Sai drew a dozen small mice and set them loose to spy out what was going on elsewhere in the headquarters. That done Sai made his own escape.

"Fuck!" Anko said.

She, Ibiki, and some of her new minions were in the holding cells. There were more than thirty enemy ninja being held prisoner. They

would make for loyal servants once they were brought over. She and Ibiki went into each cell, bit the prisoner and waited for the transformation to run its course. She already had more than a dozen. When she had all of them ready she would split them into squads to help her finish taking over ANBU Headquarters before spreading out into the village.

"Something wrong master?" Ibiki inquired.

"One of my yajuu just got sent to a better place."

"Which one?"

"No freaking clue."

"What?" Ibiki asked in surprise. "You can tell someone died but not who?"

"I've already got about sixty little voices running around the back of my head. I can't keep exact track on every single one. I can just sort of tell when someone is added or subtracted but I'm not exactly on a first name basis with each of them. I can tell it wasn't anyone really important though."

"Well what was he doing before he was taken out?"

Anko sent Ibiki an annoyed look. "They've all been told to take over as many people as they can without being discovered. I'm guessing he was trying to do that and didn't do it well enough. I didn't get any strong feelings from whoever it was before they got scragged so I've got no clue what exactly went wrong."

"Can't you read his thoughts?" Ibiki asked.

That's a little hard to do now that he's dead. Ibiki heard Anko's voice ringing clearly in his head.

I see, Ibiki thought. If you have these sorts of limits now what happens when you have thousands or millions of followers?

I can give them orders just fine, Anko thought. I can read their thoughts or speak to them or control them if I pick out the one person I want. I just can't control each and every person that closely. I'll manage fine.

Anko did not mention the headache that was starting to bother her.

"In any case," Ibiki spoke out loud. "We'll have to assume that at least one ANBU agent is aware of what's going on. Whatever cover we still had is likely gone."

"That's fine." Anko glanced at her new followers. "What are you waiting for? Get out here and start biting people! Chomp! Chomp!"

With a loud shout the former prisoners rushed out only too eager to obey.

"You didn't even tell them to use henges." Ibiki pointed out.

"If Konoha knows what's going on then there's no point to trying to hide things anymore." Anko declared. "Being subtle wastes too much damn time. Brutal and quick will do better."

In almost no time they could hear the alarm sounding.

"Well at least you were right about the quick part," Ibiki noted.

All through ANBU headquarters there were shouts and the sounds of battle as the remaining uninfected agents fought against both the former prisoners as well as their infected comrades who remained under cover of henge.

In this confusion several agents managed to get out and begin spreading the word that Konoha was once again under attack.

In Operating Room One Asuma opened and closed clawed hands. He was fully transformed into a yajuu and could hear Anko's commands within his mind. His instinct was to attack whoever was near him and turn them.

Tsunade was kneeling over him and within easy reach.

"Asuma? Can you move? Are you in pain?"

He wanted to bite her.

The thought of tasting her blood and injecting the poison into her filled him with excitement.

Anko's command echoed in his mind and called him to obedience.

Though he did not know it the only reason he was able to resist it at all was due to the stasis seal. Just as it had slowed down the process of his physical transformation it had also retarded the mental as well.

It was only temporary though. Already Asuma could feel his free will being crushed by the incessant call of his master's voice. He knew this was a fight he could not hope to win, but he was Sarutobi Asuma, son of the Third Hokage and loyal ninja of Konohagakure.

He would fight to the end.

His right hand grabbed a kunai and slashed at Tsunade's face as he leapt to his feet. "Get back!"

As he had known she would be able to Tsunade avoided the clumsy strike and jumped clear of him. A pair of her bodyguards were instantly between them.

"Asuma what are you doing?" Kurenai cried.

Slitted yellow eyes glanced at her and then back to Tsunade.

"Please forgive me Hokage-sama, but I don't know how long I will be able to hold out against the compulsion to attack you."

"I see, you're mentally controlled." Tsunade replied eyeing him cautiously. "Do you know who is in control of you? Is it Orochimaru?"

"No, it's Anko who is behind all of this. I can hear her voice in my mind and her will filling my body trying to overwhelm me."

"Anko?" Shizune said disbelievingly. "But she hates Orochimaru! Do you mean she was a sleeper agent all this time?"

Was Danzo actually right? Tsunade wondered. That bitter old man had always been in favor of sending her on a one way mission on the theory that no former apprentice of Orochimaru's could ever be trusted.

"I don't know what Orochimaru has to do with this. I can only tell you that Anko is the one trying to control me."

"Asuma we can find a way to seal whatever this is!" Kurenai called. "As long as you refuse to give into it I know you can defeat it!"

Asuma had no mirror, but he could see the new color of his skin as well as he clawed ends of his fingers. He had the vivid memory of seeing Ino's new form.

Smiling he nodded towards the Hokage. "I wish that were so, but Tsunade can see that it's not that simple."

"Asuma, I want to help you." Tsunade told him truthfully. "But I am not sure how. Whatever this is has aspects of the curse seal as well as a virus. While you were incapacitated I used every sort of sealing and anti-viral jutsu I know. All I seemed able to do was slow down the process though. With time and research though I am sure I could find a treatment though."

Asuma slowly shook his head. "Time is something I don't have and neither do you. I don't know the details but I can tell you that Anko is trying to convert everyone in this village. She is ordering every person she gets control of to go out and infect everyone they can. I don't know how many people she has already, but if it's not already too late it may be soon."

That was the absolute worst possible news.

Tsunade immediately began to think in terms of spread of an infectious disease. The key factors in how quickly and how thoroughly a plague spread were the incubation period and the rate of infection. The incubation period determined how long it took for someone who was infected to demonstrate the symptoms of the infection and become a potential carrier who could infect others. The effective incubation period here looked to be a matter of minutes. The rate of infection determined how easily a disease could spread from one patient to others. If anyone bitten was infected then the rate was basically a hundred percent.

Which made this a potential disaster of epic proportions.

"Asuma can you give me any suggestions on how to fight this?"
Tsunade asked.

"The only answer I can give you is to kill everyone who has this. If it can be cured I don't know how. All I can tell you is that once you're bitten there is no going back and that no matter how strong your will is there is no denying my master's call."

He looked over to Kurenai.

"I love you. I am sorry that I can't stay with you. The times I got to spend with you were the best of my whole life."

"Asuma... Asuma I'm going to have your child. That's what I was trying to tell you."

Surprise was clear on his face, and a slow grateful smile appeared there.

"I'm glad. Please tell our child only good stories about me, oh and don't ever let them smoke. It really is a horrible habit."

A single tear slowly fell from Kurenai's eyes. "I will, I promise. Our child will inherit the will of fire. I love you. "

He nodded.

Turning to Tsunade he bowed to her. "You are a great Hokage and I trust you will find a way to stop this."

He looked to be at peace.

"Death holds no terrors for those who have truly lived. I am a ninja of the Leaf and I do not fear death. Farewell."

With a steady hand and without hesitation Asuma slammed his kunai into his right eye.

Fallen

A telephone rang.

Picking the receiver off of its cradle he answered it. "ANBU headquarters, this is Ibiki."

"Ibiki this is the Hokage. We have an emergency! I need you to arrest and imprison Anko as quickly as possible. She has been infected with some sort of curse seal / virus and is trying to infect others. I want the entire ANBU to track her down and anyone who is with her. Then begin searching for all those who are infected. Have your people use caution since they may try and bite you and infect you as well."

"Bite us?" Ibiki sounded slightly taken aback.

"Yes bite! Now get moving! This has highest priority; it's an S plus level emergency."

"Understood Hokage-sama." Ibiki put the phone down and turned to his master. "Apparently she doesn't realize the ANBU has been compromised."

"I think she'll figure it out real soon." Anko replied wearily. She was hunched over Ibiki's desk rubbing her temples.

"Are you all right master?"

"Do I fucking look all right to you?"

Ibiki shrugged. "To be honest I have no idea what a healthy complexion looks like in this form."

Anko turned her yellow eyes to him and snarled. "You know there are times when that stoic attitude really pisses me off."

"I know."

Anko shut her eyes and kept rubbing her temples. "There are too many voices in my head. I can hear them all shouting and laughing and moving around in there. It's like being in the middle of a crowd and not being able to get away from it."

Ibiki looked at her cautiously. "If we keep up at this rate the number of voices..."

"I know," Anko snapped. "Don't worry. I'll adapt. I just need... I just need to rest awhile." She put her head down on his desk and closed her eyes."

"You want to take a nap? Now?"

"I've already given everyone their orders. Chomp. Chomp. I need to sleep and recover, I'm sure I'll get used to things. You're in charge. Take over the village. I'll lead things from there."

With that Anko fell into a deep sleep.

"I have a bad feeling about this," Ibiki muttered.

In his own mind he could still sense his master's presence, but it was a passive thing. There was no longer any sense of will or compulsion. He had his orders from before, and he felt a desire to carry them out... but he no longer felt them to be his only priority. It was like knowing you had to pick up some rice from the store. You would get to it but there was no rush.

Looking at Anko asleep in his chair it occurred to him that he could easily kill her right now. A vestige of his free will and true personality came to the fore. He approached her and produced a kunai. She did not instantly awaken or speak in his mind commanding him to stop. The two of them were alone in his office and she was powerless to act.

Ibiki stood over her and imagined driving his kunai into her neck. For the sake of the village he loved and for the duty he had always embraced he would kill her.

His hand and arm shook.

He tried to do it, to raise his weapon up and then slash down and slice her open like a ripe piece of fruit. The more he wanted to the more his arm and hand began to shake. He thought of reaching out with his other arm and strangling her. As soon as he tried that arm too began to shake and refused to obey.

When he took a couple steps back from her it passed and his body was once more still. "I see, I guess it's impossible for any of her creations to turn against her. Makes sense I guess. I wonder though..."

He brought his right hand up to his own throat and discovered there was no compulsion against taking his own life. He sliced his neck open with a clean professional stroke. As he fell over there was a relieved smile on his face.

Meanwhile the Yajuu began to run wild without any sense of order or plan.

Honto had been a ninja of the village hidden within the Mist. He had come to the Land of Fire with orders to abduct a young lord and return him to his village. He had succeeded, easily slaughtering the fool's bodyguards and capturing him. Unfortunately he'd had the extreme misfortune of running into Hatake Kakashi. The legendary copy ninja had beaten him and brought him to the ANBU for interrogation and imprisonment.

That had been more than two years ago. Now at last he was free. When he stepped outside and saw the sky again it was for the very first time since his arrival here. After two years of being locked up in a dark cell Honto the Chopper was finally free to do what he loved

most. Even before he pulled out his beloved zambato the people on the street were staring at him and a few began screaming.

It was only then that it occurred to him that he'd forgotten to use a henge. He looked like a grey skinned monster complete with claws and sharp teeth. He thought about using one to look like his old self, but decided not to bother. He kind of liked this reaction. His eyesight and other senses were sharp and he felt an amazing strength flowing through his body. And if it was possible his hunger for blood was even greater than it used to be. Pulling out his six foot long blade he discovered he could wield it with just one hand.

Leaping from the steps of ANBU headquarters to the middle of the street there was a woman standing here frozen in terror clutching a boy to her chest who couldn't have been more than seven or eight years old. "Let me hear your screams."

The woman obliged him as she let loose a high pitched shriek. The boy began to wail. Honto brought his sword down chest high and chopped them both in half with one swing. Their blood splashed into the air and onto his face and skin. The long missed salty, coppery, smell filled his lungs. Like a starving man who'd just had a single bite his appetite was whetted. He laughed and laughed as he spotted more people to chop up. He was going to have a feast!

Tenzou and Aiko were on a nearby roof top as they heard the screams coming from below.

"What is he doing?" Aiko demanded. "He's not even trying to turn people he's just slaughtering them!"

"I wonder if the master ordered him to do that was a distraction." Tenzou said with a frown. Anko's presence in the back of his mind had changed and become less active. He still felt the need to carry out her orders, but felt free to decide for himself what method to use.

"Should we stop him?"

Tenzou hesitated but shook his head. "We aren't ANBU anymore and it's no longer our duty to protect the village. We need to follow the master's orders."

Aiko frowned. "But he's slaughtering our people."

"They're not our people anymore Aiko. They're human and we're not. Come on, he's bound to draw a lot of attention. Let's move out and carry out our orders."

"Please stop!"

"I am sorry but I have orders." Komachi was an ANBU member who was using a henge to still appear human. She was in her standard ANBU armor and even had her tiger mask flipped to the back of her head. Despite having what looked like ordinary teeth she bit down on the man's neck and injected the poison. He struggled for a bit but was soon paralyzed.

Komachi gently set him down on the floor along with several other people she had already infected. She had broken into a private home and bitten everyone inside. She intended to break into one house in a neighborhood and then move to another neighborhood to do the same. Though she was infecting ordinary citizens rather than shinobi she was sure with their new found strength they would have no trouble spreading the seal to their neighbors.

"What's going on in here?"

Komachi looked up and was surprised to see two ninja enter the house. One had the markings of an Inuzuka and the other the distinctive pale eyes of a Hyuuga. She stood up with six people lying on the floor around her all momentarily paralyzed.

"This is ANBU business and none of your concern, move along." She shifted her feet into a fighting stance and slipped one hand into a pouch where she palmed some needles.

The Inuzuka rubbed at his nose furiously. "I don't think so, there is something seriously wrong going on here. You smell of rot and I can smell it coming off of all these people too. Hinata?"

The Hyuuga girl nodded. "Byakugan!" The veins near her eyes popped up noticeably as she activated her bloodline. The girls gasped at what she saw. "Kiba you were right! There's something wrong with her chakra system. It looks as though it's been polluted somehow." She glanced at the people on the floor. "The same is happening to all of them."

"Yeah, I don't need to see their chakra to know something is wrong with them." The stink was coming off of them and he could see their bodies changing. A woman near the door had skin that was bluish grey and claws. He could transform into a bestial form but that was a temporary jutsu. She was a civilian and whatever had been done to her didn't look to be temporary. Kiba gave the ANBU a hard look and pulled out a kunai. "Just what did you do to these people?"

"I was just following orders." Komachi told him. She had three needles in her right hand and was waiting for the moment to act.

"That's a lie," Kiba declared. "The Hokage would never order anything like this."

Komachi grinned. "Who said the orders were from the Hokage?"

The woman by the door gave a groan and began to move.

"Please stay still, I will try to help you." Hinata knelt over the woman and performed a basic diagnostic jutsu.

The woman opened yellow and slitted eyes and moved with shocking speed. She grabbed Hinata by the forearm and before the kunoichi could react sank her teeth into her wrist.

"Aaaaahh!" Hinata cried out in surprise and sudden pain.

"Hinata!" Kiba turned to help her.

Komachi had her opening and did not hesitate. Three long throwing needles flashed from her hand and pierced Kiba's throat. With a choked off gurgle he stumbled and fell.

"Not to worry," Komachi told him as she knelt by his side. "I didn't hit any vital points, you'll live. Welcome to our team." She bit down on him.

Danzo listened to the reports, first from Sai and then from his other agents. A large number of his people could no longer be contacted. The mice created by Sai gave him a view of what was going on inside ANBU headquarters. From all the news that was coming in a frightening picture was developing.

"The ANBU has already been defeated and this strange plague is spreading quickly throughout the village."

"What are your orders Danzo-sama?" Sai asked.

The old ninja gave a heavy sigh. No matter what his enemies thought of him he truly loved his village. Everything he had done had been for her sake. Every crime and every sin were committed to protect Konoha. "Order all ROOT agents to withdraw from the village and to assemble at point 'K.' Also send a report to the Hokage of what is happening once our people are safely withdrawn."

"Get the students out of here!" Iruka shouted.

He had no idea what was going on but a group of three ANBU had suddenly arrived and started attacking the students. He attacked one of them and was surprised to see just how strong and fast the man was. He kept fighting though to help buy the students and other instructors time.

He was glad that most of them had gotten away by the time he was knocked down and one of them bit him.

"The only thing that could make this day better is if I could run into that Kakashi again." Honto the chopper declared.

The street was filled with the sliced up carts of dozens of people and blood was flowing through the gutters. He'd even fought a couple of leaf ninja and had the pleasure of hacking them to pieces too. He'd been a Jonin, and a strong one, now though he felt invincible. The power that filled him was like a dream. He looked at all the blood and pieces of meat and felt happier than he could ever remember.

There was a large puff of smoke. When it cleared Honto found himself facing a white haired ninja with a giant scroll slung over his back. "I am not sure who or what you are, but this is as far as you go."

Honto instantly recognized the man from the Bingo Book. A wide smile of needle teeth split his face. "You're Jiraiya of the Sanin aren't you?"

Jiraiya gave a curt nod. "I am. Who are you and what are you doing here? Why have you attacked all these people?"

"Because it was fun." He answered with an honest laugh. "They call me Honto the chopper back in Bloody Mist. I was a prisoner here until just a little while ago."

Jiraiya's eyes could follow the trail of bloodshed and body parts. They pointed like an arrow back in the direction of ANBU headquarters. "What are you? This form doesn't seem to be a jutsu."

"They tell me that I am a Yajuu now. My master gave me and all the others orders to go out and convert people into this form." He chuckled. "That seemed sort of boring and I just couldn't pass up the

chance to enjoy myself. I could feel the master watching over me in my head, but now I'm free to do what I like."

Jiraiya found a lot of that to be troubling. "Who was it that did this to you? Who is this master? Is it Orochimaru?"

Honto grinned and whipped his massive sword about in a display of his strength and ability. "I'd love to tell you but the dead don't need to worry about things like that." He raced forward with an eager heart to slice the famous Toad sage into pieces.

" *Hari Jizō no jutsu* ." Jiraiya's spiky hair grew and expanded into a hardened cocoon protecting his entire body.

Honto slammed his zambato with all of his might only to see it strike the spiky barrier and bounce off. Focused on chopping up one of the Sanin he stood his ground and kept striking as hard as he could. All his ferocious strikes though could not make a crack in the protective cocoon.

As he drew back his sword to try again the hair suddenly reverted back to its original form. Jiraiya had a ball of condensed chakra in his palm. Before Honto could swing his sword down Jiraiya ruthlessly slammed the ball into and through his chest.

Jiraiya spared his defeated opponent just a moment. He saw the form remained in death. That was one more thing to worry him. A jutsu would have expired with the shinobi's death. The fact he remained in this form even in death was deeply troubling.

He set out for ANBU headquarters in search of answers.

"What does Danzo mean the ANBU have been infected and that the village can no longer be saved?"

The ROOT ANBU bowed apologetically. He wore the mask of an ant.
"I apologize Hokage-sama, that was all I was told."

"Where is Danzo now? I need to talk to him and find out what he knows!" Tsunade demanded in mounting frustration.

The ninja again bowed to her. "Danzo-sama is currently in transit and I do not know either his current location or destination."

She'd gotten all sorts of confusing reports from all over the village. Ninja and civilians being attacked. Sightings of grey skinned monsters with claws and sharp teeth. There had been an attack on the academy on the shopping district. Since her phone call to Ibiki there had been no further word from the ANBU. All calls made to them went unanswered and ninja sent there didn't report back.

If what Asuma had told her as true the village was in serious danger. If people could be infected with a bite and transformed in a matter of minutes as had happened to Asuma this was an epidemic of horrific proportions. She was Hokage, but she was first and foremost a medic nin and thought like one. There was a 'disease' spreading through the village for which she had no treatment. She had no firm information on how many were currently infected or what parts of Konoha were infected.

Until she came up with a treatment there was nothing she could do for the infected. All she could do was try and save as many of those still unaffected as possible. She had to keep the healthy separated from the sick. In other words what she needed to do was set up a quarantine.

"Shizune, set the sirens to sound 'immediate evacuation.'"

"What?" Shizune cried. "Lady Tsunade if you do that then most of the people in the village will be trapped! There's no way to organize a proper evacuation under these circumstances."

"Don't you think I know that?" Tsunade snapped. "There is no other choice! I can't fix this before we lose everyone! All I can do now is save as many as I can and try to figure out a solution. Now go and send out the order while there's still time!"

Looking miserable Shizune nodded and hurried out the door.

The sirens all across Konoha uttered three short blasts then paused and repeated.

The ninja and the villagers had been taught what that signal meant.

The ninja fled as quickly as they could, most not bothering with the gate but simply walking up and leaping over the nearest section of wall.

The civilians had only one way out. They rushed to get to the gate as quickly as they could. There was no time for packing and at best people were only able to grab family members and a few precious items before fleeing. Those who happened to live near the gate were the lucky ones. They were able to get out with relative ease.

Soon though there were people from every neighborhood filling up the road and pressing together trying to get out. Many were crushed or stampeded to death. Those who had tried to bring wagons or rickshaws with them had them overturned by folk desperate to escape.

Before too long though the packed crowd at the gate attracted the wrong sort of attention as many Yajuu descended on them. People screamed and cried for help but there were no ninja to help them and nowhere to run.

Eventually the massive gates were shut and the sirens silenced. The Hokage and the leaf ninja were gone and the village was in the hands of the Yajuu.

Konoha had fallen.

Hinata

The sirens were blaring.

Three short blasts, then a pause, and then three more, over and over again. Along with the sirens were the shouts and screams from the civilians. People were running past her in confusion. Some were heading for the gate, others in the opposite direction. Most people ignored her and went by in a blind panic. Some recognized who she was and asked what was going on, why the evacuation signal was blaring.

It was complete and utter chaos.

Hinata could not remember a better day in her whole life. There was a wide smile on her face and she was *skipping* . She could feel the strength and vitality coursing through her body. In the back of her mind was a presence that she thought was important, but was silent. Komachi had ordered her and Kiba to go out and convert people. Hinata had not felt compelled to obey and had her own ideas about what to do.

This must be what it feels like to be truly free . She thought. She was no longer afraid or shy. The thought of all her previous worries made her want to laugh. How could she have been so stupid and weak? Things were so clear now! She would fix things with her family and then find Naruto-kun. Once she converted him they could finally be together.

Humming a silly tune she continued to skip through the wailing crowds.

The Hyuuga mansion was in a rare state of confusion. The unexpected evacuation signal had taken everyone by surprise. Most of the ninja had waited to receive orders, but when none came most

of both the main and cadet branch decided their first duty was to protect their immediate family. Just as in every clan, many of the members were not ninja. This was not even including children too young to have started training. With no specific orders the ninja had sought to protect their wives, husbands, children, and other close relations.

Hinata watched ninja hurrying across the compound with a spouse in their arms and a child sitting atop their shoulders. They would carry them up and over the wall and to temporary safety.

It's useless, she thought. The time for man is already over.

She made no effort to interfere. Even if most of the Hyuuga clan escaped it didn't matter. Nothing could stop what was coming.

Also... Hinata found it rather endearing, members of her family acting out of love for once. Caring more about their children and spouses than about 'duty.' It was fine if they escaped and had a little time together before they were eventually caught.

"Byakugan." She activated her bloodline.

The walls of the mansion became transparent. The building was far from empty. She counted up twenty people spread all over it. Some looked to be gathering things before leaving. Others were running around, perhaps looking for loved ones, a few were in rooms just standing there.

Probably afraid to leave without permission.

If any of them were using their bloodline they would have instantly seen through her disguise. Working together they might have even been a threat. But of course, no one but her father was permitted to activate the Byakugan on the family grounds without permission. It was just one more way for the head of the family to maintain control, even when it meant weakening the security of their home.

She shook her head and hurried inside.

Even without her bloodline Hinata would have known just where to go to find father. She walked into his study without bothering to knock, a first. Her father and Hanabi were gathering up the scrolls with all of the Hyuuga techniques. She was anything but surprised, to her father these pieces of paper and ink were what mattered most; they were the real family legacy. The actual flesh and blood members of the clan were inconsequential.

Even when they were daughters.

Father spared her a single quick glance. "Hinata, good, help your sister with the remaining scrolls. As soon as we have them you will join us in leaving the village. I have no idea what has happened but the Hokage had best have an excellent reason for ordering an evacuation." He gave one of those dire frowns that always made her want to tremble. "If this is all some sort of exercise I will make her regret it."

Why was I always so afraid? Grinning she slid both hands behind her back and strolled over to her father's side. "You need not fear father, the emergency is real enough."

"Do you know what is happening sister?" Hanabi asked politely.

Hinata nodded. "The world is ending, or perhaps it is more accurate to say a new world is being born."

"What foolishness are you babbling about?" Hiashi asked.

Hinata stood casually at his side. "It is the truth father. It is the dawn of a brand new age. Everything that has gone before will pass away into the dust."

"Have you suffered some sort of head trauma? You are speaking nonsense."

"I am not surprised you think that father, after all, you have always been dismissive of anyone or anything that did not meet your expectations." Hinata casually placed a hand on his chest. "That is why there is no place for you in this new world."

Hinata sent a pulse of chakra out from her fingertips, tearing open his heart muscle.

Hiashi gasped, blood spurted from his mouth. He reached out to Hinata, stumbled, and collapsed at her feet.

Hinata stood there and just smiled.

Five miles outside of Konoha Tsunade was struggling to piece together some kind of order. She was thinking like a medic nin as much as she was as a Hokage. The first rule of setting up any quarantine was to keep the infected and the uninfected separate. She had quickly realized that the best way to accomplish that was to set up squads with Hyuuga and Inuzuka members in them. Their natural abilities allowed them to detect the infected even when disguised.

Tsunade had also spread the word that until further notice ninja were forbidden to use henge or any form of genjutsu. Any ninja who was detected using such was to be attacked immediately. All the refugees were being discreetly screened to make sure they were what they appeared to be. So far none of the 'yajuu' had shown up among them. For the time being at least they looked to be satisfied staying within the village. She had sent some of her scouts to keep an eye on the gate and wall. They had orders to observe and warn her if there was any sign of the enemy leaving the village proper. The reports she's received so far were that the gates were now shut and the only people still escaping were ninja or people being aided by ninja.

Rough estimates put the number of civilians who's made it out at about five thousand. Which meant the rest of the population, roughly

four hundred and ninety thousand, was trapped and likely being infected. Tsunade ground her teeth and clenched her fists so hard they began to shake. Those people were her responsibility damn it! As Hokage it was her sworn duty to protect the people of Konoha, instead she had run away and abandoned them.

The medic nin in her understood there had been no choice. The plague was spreading too quickly and she had no treatment. Leaving, and saving those she could, had been the only sensible course of action.

That didn't mean she liked it.

"Where the hell is Danzou?"

"I am sorry Lady Tsunade," a much harried Shizune said. "No one seems to know. So far as I can tell no Root members appear to be among the survivors. Perhaps none of them escaped."

Tsunade shook her head. "The rats always find a way off the ship."

All around her a temporary refugee camp was being set up. Most of the civilians had little more than the clothes on their back. The ninja not needed for screening or scouting duties were gathering water and helping set up impromptu shelters. Everywhere there seemed to be children crying and adults searching for loved ones. If the worst came this would be all that would remain of her grandfather's village.

In one of the pockets of her green jacket was a very special scroll tied shut with a black ribbon. As she had abandoned her office she had made sure to retrieve it along with many other vital scrolls and documents. If the worst came...

She shook her head. Now was not the time for such morbid thoughts. Tsunade knew she was the greatest living medic nin in the world. This disease was like nothing she had ever witnessed before, but it was still a disease. Certainly there had to be a cure for it. She

just needed to find it in time to help those who had been afflicted. She *could* save those people, she knew it.

"What we need is information," Tsunade growled. "I need to know more about this sickness and its cause."

Out of nowhere there was a massive burst of white smoke.

Tsunade, Shizune, and every other ninja in the area drew a weapon and dropped into a fighting stance.

A familiar laugh came out of the smoke as it began to clear. "All you ever had to do was ask."

There before them was a red and black toad the size of a small house. Standing on his back was Jiraiya. Her fellow member of the sannin had two figures gagged and tied up in ropes slung over his shoulders. He leapt down and placed the two prisoners at her feet. They had claws and steely grey skin, both were unconscious.

"That one," Jiraiya pointed to the yajuu on the right. "Is a ninja, the other is a civilian. I figured I would get you one of each."

Tsunade blinked at him and stared for just a moment. Before shaking her head with a laugh. "You may be a damn pervert, but there's no denying you're an amazing ninja too. How on earth did you manage to capture these two and make it out of the village?"

"You're joking right? For a ninja of my abilities it was a snap. I was actually hoping to investigate ANBU headquarters when I picked up my gifts for you."

"You've been inside ANBU tower?" She asked hopefully.

Jiraiya shook his head. "I had four ninja attack me before I could get within two blocks. All four were wearing ANBU masks. Normally that wouldn't have been a challenge, but whatever this is makes shinobi a lot stronger, faster, and resistant to harm. I still could have dealt

with them, but another half dozen were coming. I decided not to press my luck."

"You made the right choice. Having live specimens to study will help me formulate some kind of cure. Not to mention having prisoners we can ask questions." Tsunade hesitated. "What is it like inside the village right now?"

"It's bad. They're not even trying to hide themselves anymore. You've got them running around in the open attacking any normal people they see and turning them into monsters a few minutes after being bitten. Just about everyone who was trying to escape has been attacked. Most of the people who are still inside Konoha are in hiding, but you've got hundreds of these guys going door to door searching. The way they're going my guess everyone will be bitten by tomorrow."

"That soon?" Tsunade asked. As bad as things had looked she had expected to have at least a week or so before the whole population was infected.

Jiraiya gave a single firm nod. "There is a core group that looks very organized. A lot of the ones who get transformed join in and help them."

"Not all of them?" Shizune asked.

"No, some of them are just wandering about, some are picking fights or looting. The behavior is pretty scattered. Like I said, there's a bunch who are acting just like soldiers under orders, but a lot are acting like clueless civilians."

"That's a good sign isn't it?" Shizune suggested. "I mean if they aren't helping maybe they will get in the way and slow things down."

Jiraiya shook his head. "They're not getting in the way, they're just not active. And enough of the new ones are helping that it won't make a difference. Like I said, expect the entire village to be

changed by some time tomorrow. Maybe there will be a few hold outs, but ninety nine percent will be gone by then."

Tsunade shut her eyes.

Eight hundred years ago there had been a village in Swamp Country that had suffered a sudden outbreak of a horrid disease dubbed 'rotting sickness.' The people who caught it would literally watch as their limbs began to blacken and eventually rot away. The disease was highly contagious and spread through the village like wildfire.

When the ruler of Swamp Country learned what was happening he ordered the village to be surrounded by his troops and that anyone attempting to enter or leave it be killed by bow. When the entire population died off the village was burned down and the lands permanently closed to human habitation.

The actions had certainly been ruthless, but the disease had not spread. The sacrifice of those villagers had undoubtedly saved thousands of other lives.

Once more she thought of the scroll hidden in her pocket.

"One thing at a time." She muttered to herself. "Shizune, set up a medical tent away from everyone else and get ten ninja to act as security."

"Right away Lady Tsunade."

"Jiraiya, come with me. We need to talk."

He grinned at her. "Finally going to come out and admit your love for me?"

"Didn't I tell you I'd only do that when the world ends?"

"Yes you did."

He didn't say anything more.

"Tousan!" Hanabi screamed.

"He is dead." Hinata stepped over the body. "Aren't you relieved Hanabi?"

"Relieved? How could you even think that?"

"You don't need to pretend with me." Hinata told her. "I know how cold and demanding he was. I know that he never showed you even a bit of warmth, while always giving you subtle hints about what would happen if you disappointed him. Always living under the threat of having the Caged Bird Seal placed on you and being banished to the Cadet Branch or being married off in some political marriage you had no say in. Be honest, aren't you glad he's dead?"

"No! I loved father! Everything he did was for my own good!"

Hinata smirked, she'd sounded exactly like that when she was still the family heir. "What a dutiful daughter you are."

Hanabi dropped into a jyuken fighting stance. "Why?"

Hinata imitated her. "Because he was everything I hated from my old life. I wasn't about to let him try and ruin my new one."

"Byakugan." Hanabi activated her bloodline.

Hinata reactivated hers.

Hanabi gasped. "Hinata! What has happened to you? Your chakra system! It's been poisoned, your whole body has been deformed!"

Hinata laughed at her. "It's been improved. Everything about me is better than it was, it's like I was reborn."

"You're ugly! You've become a monster!"

"Beauty is in the eye of the beholder little sister. Once you are like me you'll understand."

"I don't want to be like you."

"You are the heir of the Hyuuga main branch. You don't get to make any choices." Hinata suddenly grabbed her father's desk with both hands and easily threw it across the room at her sister.

There was no room to dodge. Hanabi dived for the floor and only avoided being hit. As she jumped back to her feet her sister was on top of her, throwing jyuken strikes and landing hits on her right shoulder and arm.

"Throwing pieces of furniture is no part of a proper match!"

Hinata giggled at the outrage in her sister's voice. "This isn't a match Hanabi," she grabbed her sister by the wrist and threw her across the room into the far wall. "This is combat. We aren't at the academy or in the family doujo. There are no rules here."

Hanabi got back up to her feet, legs shaking a bit. The middle three fingers of her right hand felt numb. She could see three chakra points had been shut down. The part of her back that had struck the wall hurt. She had yet to land a blow on Hinata.

"Are you afraid to face me in an honorable manner?" Hanabi demanded. "Do you fear my superior skill?"

Hinata rolled her pupil less eyes. "You know I'd forgotten how much nonsense the academy spoon feeds you. Even the family with all the talk of honor and tradition and how to fight as a proper ninja. You won't understand the truth until you are on a real mission. When some very skilled enemy shinobi twice your size is trying to kill you, you don't worry about etiquette, you do whatever it takes to live one minute more. **That** is what being a ninja is."

"You try and sound wise, but I know the truth. You are weak. Father always said you didn't have the will to be a true Hyuuga shinobi."

Hinata glanced to where Hiashi's body was. "Want to ask him what he thinks now?"

"Yaaaaahhh!" Hanabi charged at her.

Hinata stood her ground. She blocked each ragged strike and landed a number of counters, shutting down more and more of Hanabi's chakra points.

"Do you want to know a secret little sister? The reason you always won against me was because I always held back. I loved you, and I just couldn't bring myself to try and hurt you. So father was right, my heart just wasn't hard enough." Hinata landed a three strike combo on Hanabi's right thigh that caused her to stagger. "But I am now."

Hinata brought a sweeping kick into the back of her sister's leg that knocked her down. Before Hanabi could escape Hinata knelt on her back and grabbed both wrists.

"You didn't hit me even once, father would be ashamed of you."

Hanabi tried desperately to squirm free, but there was no getting away. "You are a traitor and no sister of mine! I despise and hate you."

"That's all right. You'll feel different in a few minutes. Welcome to your new family."

She bit Hanabi's wrist.

Notice

Author's Note: There is something I would like to announce. The concept of this story was not originally mine. It belonged to someone else who wanted me to actually write it out for him. This isn't all that unusual, I have gotten a good many requests from people to use their story idea or OC. I normally decline these requests, but I agreed to do this one. The writing was all mine but the original idea was not.

The person who came up with it is **jokerisdaking**, he and I have mutually agreed to let him take over the story now. He still has a great interest in it and I have changed my focus to other projects. So while I will be discontinuing my version you will find another on fanfiction.

I want to make it clear that this continuation by a different author is NOT plagiarized. It is being done with my okay, and since the original concept came from **jokerisdaking**, and was written at his request, I consider it to be his story.

I wish him the best of luck with the continuation.